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AN INTERESTING NARRATIVE.

THE MISSISSIPPI SCOUT;

A DETAIL OF

WHAT THE WRITER SAW IN A SCOUT INSIDE THE REBEL LINES AROUND VICKSBURG, IN 1863.

By S. WOOLWORTH.

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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS:
1867.

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MISSISSIPPI SCOUT;

OR,

A DETAIL OF WHAT THE WRITER SAW,

IN A SCOUT,

Inside the Rebel Lines around Vicksburg, in 1863.

BY S. WOOLWORTH.

IT ALSO CONTAINS AN ADVERTISEMENT OF A BOOK WHICH HE IS NOW PUBLISHING.

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1867.

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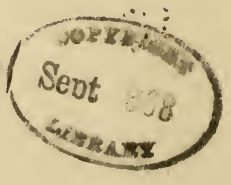

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THE MISSISSIPPI SCOUT.

THIS little narrative is to compose part of a work which is to be published shortly by SOLOMON WOOLWORTH.

This story will give the history of what the writer saw inside the rebel lines, in and about Vicksburg, Mississippi, commencing at the time the Union army lay at Young's Point, February 2d, 1863, digging what was called Butler's ditch, (the canal across Young's Point,) to turn the Mississippi river. It will be remembered that the Mississippi, at this time, was eight feet above the level of the country, only kept within its bounds by a levee, which was about twelve feet across the top, and which we were daily expecting would be cut by the rebels, thus leaving us the only means of escaping by our fleet, which was continually fired up, ready for embarkation at a moment's notice. The fleet consisted of one hundred and ten Mississippi steamers.

The ground on which we were camped, there were six inches of water on it. The only means of keeping dry was, by falling trees in the water, and making our beds on the logs. At this time the Union army in front of Vicksburg numbered forty thousand, inclusive of which about twelve thousand were in hospital. They were dying at the rate of from sixty to seventy a day. The levee being the only dry place in the surrounding country, their bodies were interred upon it, which gave the levee the appearance of one immense cemetery.

This period was one of the most melancholy hours for the Union army during the whole rebellion. But a short time previous, Holly Springs was captured, sacked, and burned, by the rebel General Van Dorn's cavalry. One million dollars' worth of army supplies, which were to have fed the army through the winter, also the money which was to pay the army, fell a prey to the rebels, making it necessary for the whole army to retreat to Memphis, Tennessee, leaving a distance of two hundred and

fifty miles in the hands of the rebels, which we had fought hard for. Also, at about this time the memorable battle of Stone river was fought. At the first report, the army was inspired with hope, as the news came that General Rosecrans had achieved a great victory; but the second report proved it to be only a drawn battle, and nothing substantial had been gained. General Rosecrans was compelled to retreat to Murfreesboro, entrench himself, and go into winter quarters. It was then proved the old adage was true, that trouble never came alone. In a few days after this came General Burnside's awful defeat, whereby nearly half the Potomac army was slaughtered. The remnant of the Potomac army remaining was compelled to retreat almost to Washington, D. C., and go into winter quarters. It will also be remembered, about one month previous General Sherman was defeated on the Yazoo river, at Hain's bluff, with about thirty thousand men, compelling him to retreat in the night and embark upon the fleet, to save his army. The writer was in this fight, which lasted three days. Our loss was seven hundred killed and twenty-five hundred wounded.

In view of all these disasters, the Union army was on the eve of despair, so much so, that the bravest and most rugged of our soldiers looked in each other's face, saying: "Will we ever be able to conquer this rebellion and return to our homes?"

The rebels in Vicksburg amused themselves by throwing shells into our camp; first from Whistling Dick, then from Lady Butler, and then from General Bragg, these being the names of their biggest and best guns, by which they were enabled to throw shells successfully into our camp, it being about three miles from the city of Vicksburg. I recollect, one day, when a shell from one of these guns burst in the Mississippi, at the mouth of the canal, where the Sixth Missouri regiment were digging, which nearly drowned the whole regiment. This caused great merriment among the boys. The rebels were arrogant at this time—flushed with victory. The few prisoners who accidentally fell into our hands about this time said, all they desired was to have us attack the city, as there was a grave prepared for each of us—that they would overwhelm and annihilate us, as they had the balance of the Union armies.

They reported that the city was under command of General Jo Johnson, with one hundred and ten thousand men, and Generals Van Dorn and Prim were at Jackson, with sixty thousand men well entrenched. Notwithstanding all these despondencies, which were enough to overwhelm the strongest heart, the greater number of our officers were continually inebriated, and busied themselves gambling, day and night, which placed the army in a more critical condition. My heart sickened at the spectacle before me. It is to be hoped that this present nor future generations shall ever witness such a trial. I lay many nights, sleepless, studying how this terrible crisis would end. I finally concluded to go to General Grant's headquarters, to ascertain if I could get detailed from my regiment, to go through the rebel lines for him. I thought if I remained where I was that death would be inevitable, and that I could but die if I went through the rebel lines and was found out to be a Union spy; besides, I was moved by curiosity to find out what was masked behind those ever-booming cannons and beyond the hills that gloomed up at a distance. I accordingly set out for General Grant's headquarters, which I learned were on the steamer Magnolia, lying about the middle of our fleet. Upon presenting myself at the steamboat, I inquired for General Grant. I was told that he was absent. While I stood upon the river bank, amusing myself by surveying the fleet, there suddenly rode towards me a general. From previous descriptions, I believed it to be General Grant. His face was careworn; his shoulder-straps would be but a poor comparison with the lowest officers in his command; his horse was very much jaded; he held in his mouth a cigar, which he seemed to chew rather than smoke. I afterwards learned he was very fond of cigars in this way. To use the phrase of an eastern Yankee, he appeared like a man who had a violent fit of the blues. As he rode up to me I said: "General Grant, I believe?" "Yes," was the reply; "what do you wish of me?" I told him, a few moments' conversation. He told me to step on the boat, to his headquarters, that he would be there in a moment. As he came in, he said: "What do you wish to say to me?" I said: "General, I wish to go to Vicksburg." He looked me in the eye with a piercing glance, then said: "Do you think you can go there?" After a brief conversation, he

gave me a pass to pass our guards, or pickets, at any hour, day or night; also, an order to the colonel of my regiment, stating that he had detailed me for services for himself. He then bid me good speed, and told me to learn all I could about the enemy, and to report to him as soon as I could. I gave my colonel the order and prepared for my journey. I obtained a suit of rebel uniform, which was captured by our armies at Arkansas post. I remained with my company that night. Before daylight next morning we heard a terrible cannonading, such as was not heard while we were on the front. We started towards Vicksburg to ascertain the cause of such heavy cannonading; we found it to be the ram Queen of the West running past the batteries.

The bluffs of Vicksburg had the appearance of an immense volcano. It is believed that over one thousand shells were fired at the Queen of the West as she was passing Vicksburg. The rebels had but one boat lying at the wharf, which was called the Vicksburg. In the midst of the terrible storm of shot and shell, the Queen headed toward the shore, running her bow into the Vicksburg about six feet, in his 'midships. The rebels, with guns in hand, ran to the river bank and demanded her to surrender, but, supposing her an easy prey, did not fire on her until she had backed from the shore; then they saw their mistake, and fired a volley, but without effect. She then proceeded down the river until she got below the range of their batteries, where she landed. We went to see how much she was injured, and found the cotton that secured her sides was all on fire, as she was struck eleven times with red-hot shot; the most of them lodged in the cotton that protected her sides, one of which had taken effect in her hull. By the prompt assistance of the soldiers the fire was extinguished and she was saved. After this, she proceeded cautiously down the river for a distance of five miles. She then came abreast of the Warrington batteries. She headed toward shore, and gave them the first round, from two of her bow guns. This waked up the rebels, to which they briskly replied, throwing shell and shot upon her until she withdrew out of range of their guns.

I proceeded on my journey to the outposts of our army, it being about eight miles down the river. Our outposts were situated on a plantation which had been deserted by the rebels.

I remained over a night with the boys. Early in the morning I proceeded outside of our lines, leaving my pass in a cotton gin which was a short distance outside of our lines. In case I was taken prisoner, they would not find any positive proof that I was a spy. The first place that I arrived at was an old plantation, where there were several negro huts, inhabited by a few old negroes, that were worth nothing to the rebels, only to give information of our movements. I asked one of these negroes for some sweet potatoes for my breakfast. He said: "You are a white man and I am a nigger. You want to get off here, to save your life, as soon as you can. Don't wait for sweet potatoes. I love my massa. You don't know how soon dem Yankees will be hear. Dey was here yesterday, and took everything dat was on de place." I profited by his advice, and quickly left the plantation. The next place I arrived at was a distance of five miles below; there were two adjoining plantations, inhabited by about fifteen or twenty women. I asked these women for something to eat, as I was very hungry. They asked me if I had been a soldier. I told them I was not. They said it was a shame for any man not to be in the army when they were so much required, and they would not give anything to eat to any one who was not a soldier. They thought of dressing in men's attire, and joining the Vicksburg army themselves. I proceeded a few miles further down, and arrived at another plantation, where there were about a dozen or more women. I concluded to change my story; as I was amongst such patriotic women, I could not obtain anything to eat, if I did not say I was a soldier. I accordingly told those women I was captured at Arkansas post by the Yankees, and managed to escape from them. They made many inquiries as to how and what those dreadful Yankees done, and how their men were used; and, smothering me with kisses, gave me all I wished to eat. I inquired how far down the Confederate pickets were on the opposite side of the river. I told them I intended to join the Vicksburg army. They gave me all the information they could regarding the army, pickets, etc., and told me where I could find a dugout, in a bend of the river, in which I could cross the river. I then proceeded about two miles further. I arrived at another plantation, where there was another cotton gin, filled

with ginned cotton. Here I stopped for the night, digging a hole and burying myself entirely in the cotton. I also remained here the next day. During that day a party of rebels came, I could not tell whether they were guerrillas or soldiers, and, counseling whether to burn it or not, they finally concluded that one of the party should remain here and watch the movements of the Yankees, and if they were likely to come there, to fire it before they arrived there. The last resolution suited me much the best, although I had nothing to say in the whole of the council. I remained undisturbed until evening. I cautiously crept from my hiding place, and went to where I was informed the boat was, and found it as I was told. I got into the boat, and proceeded with great caution below the point where I was told the rebel pickets were stationed. I then attempted to cross the river. When nearing the other shore, I was fired on from the pickets, two of which went through my hat, three through my coat, and several entered the boat's side. I lay down in the stern of the boat, holding the paddle so that the boat would head toward the shore I came from, when the trees on the bank of the river obscured me from view of the pickets. I then proceeded cautiously down the river for considerable distance, close to the shore. I then attempted to cross the river again. I was, this time, successful. I then proceeded cautiously up the river on the other side, until I got where I could distinguish fires; from the appearance, I concluded were the picket lines. I proceeded along the lines by keeping out of range of their guns, to ascertain if I could find a space between their fires, where I could pass unnoticed. I had not gone far when I found the desired spot, which was a swamp, lying between two pickets. I knew if I was once inside the picket lines, no questions would be asked me, as to who I was, nor where I belonged. I went through this swamp as cautious as possible, part of the time walking on logs, and part of the time wading through water, waist deep; at length I was successful in getting inside the rebel lines. I avoided all officers' headquarters, lest I should be questioned as to where I belonged, but I gained all the information I could from private soldiers. I learned that the Queen of the West created great excitement in Vicksburg, and that the pickets were drawn further down the river, which

was the cause of my being fired on. The rebels had fondly believed that no boat could pass their batteries, but this spell was now broken. I ascertained from soldiers where provost guard was stationed, as no soldier likes to come in contact with the provost guard, and will give another soldier all the information he can respecting them. I proceeded as near to Vicksburg as I could without coming in contact with the provost guard, as I was aware I would be arrested if I met them, as I had not a pass. I ascertained from the soldiers around Vicksburg, that the total amount of rebel troops was about sixty thousand in the vicinity of Vicksburg, under the immediate command of General Memenger, and that the officer commanding the department was General Pemberton, with headquarters at Jackson, Mississippi. As near as I could ascertain, there were about twenty thousand troops at Jackson. I learned they were but poorly supplied, as they had not drawn but half rations for many weeks. The only means they had of supplying the city, was by a single railroad, running from Jackson to Vicksburg, which was in very bad repair. I also ascertained that they had twenty batteries bearing on the river, mounting one hundred and twelve guns. I also learned that four of those batteries were water batteries, mounted on the river bank, bearing four guns each, the other sixteen were mounted upon the highest bluffs around the city, ranging a distance of about four miles. I learned that the city was strongly entrenched about three miles in the rear of the city. These entrenchments extended all around the city, and were mounted with heavy artillery. I also learned that the only road by which the city could be entered on the lower side, extended through a large space of low ground, which was at that time covered with water, rendering it impossible to land an army at any place along the Mississippi. On the other side there was a large swamp, (which was utterly impassable,) running parrellel with the road. This road was strongly fortified; there were forts built at every place where it was possible to build a fort, and was strongly entrenched with breast works, which were built in such a position that they could bear a cross fire on the road. I obtained from some of the rebel soldiers something to eat, also some provisions to carry with me, (in my pocket.) I made my way through the pickets again, the same way I came. When

fairly outside the rebel lines, I traveled two or three miles, when it was quite daylight. I then took up my abode in a thick cane-break, where I remained until the next night, when I crept cautiously out of the cane, and proceeded to the boat, where I arrived without being molested. I crossed the river, left my boat, and proceeded on my way, without calling on my female friends. I met with no further obstacle until I got close to our lines. It was nearly night, and I dare not attempt to go through the lines, therefore I stopped in another cotton gin until morning, when I again started and came to our pickets; the cavalry pickets were situated about the middle of a cotton field, a distance of about forty rods from which I was approaching. Between them and the Mississippi, there was a road which run along the edge of the woods. I did not follow this road. I was afraid they would think there were more than me, and probably would fire on me, as they would take me for a rebel. When I got in full view in the field, the pickets put spurs to their horses, and retreated to the woods. I was astonished to see them run from a single unarmed man. When I arrived at their picket post, they again galloped from the woods toward me, with their carbines cocked, and demanded me to surrender myself a prisoner to them. I told them not to be so fast, as I was a Union soldier. They said: "It was damn pretty to see a Union soldier dressed in rebel uniform." I told them if they would go to yonder cotton gin with me, I would show them a pass from General Grant, they accordingly done so. They took me to the headquarters of the pickets. Here they gave me something to eat. The lieutenant in command said that he knew it to be the general's hand-writing, but he had orders to send any one who came through the lines, to division headquarters, as prisoners. The division was commanded by Major General Steele. I was furnished with a horse to ride, and there were two guards sent with me to General Steele's headquarters. The horse was very acceptable, as I was very tired, and part of the levee had been washed away, and I would have to wade through water, a distance of at least one mile. On arriving at General Steele's headquarters, the guards gave him my pass, which they had retained until this time. General Steele released me from the guards, and ordered them to return to the picket lines, and told me to come

into his office, which was then in a house which had been deserted by the rebels. He gave me a dram of whiskey from a bottle which stood on the mantel-shelf. I think it was the best I ever tasted. He told me to sit down and warm me, as I was drenched with rain. It had been raining all day.

He asked where I had been. I told him to Vicksburg. I also told him the precise position of the rebel army, as near as I could. He said the information I had gained would be of great value to General Grant, and I must report to him immediately. He gave me a hasty shake by the hand, and said I was a brave soldier; that there were but few in the army that would be brave enough to do what I had done. When I went to my company the boys were very glad to see me. They said they never expected to see me alive again. I staid with the company that night, and reported to General Grant next morning. I found him on the Magnolia; he took me into his headquarters, and asked me what I had seen. I gave him a description of what I saw. He had his topographical engineer note down the position of the batteries and fortifications around Vicksburg as I told him. He asked me if I thought the army could be successfully landed below the city, or if the city could be approached from below. I told him it would be almost an impossibility to effect a landing; and if a landing was effected, it would be of no avail, as the army would be half slaughtered, and there would be nothing accomplished. I had a project of my own which I laid open to the General, which would silence the batteries around Vicksburg; which was, to take fifty of the bravest men in the command, mount them on horses, and go below the city to where there was a ferry boat, that we had captured from them; to give me command of them. I proposed to have each of these men armed with six navy revolvers and clothed with rebel uniforms. We would ride up to the rebel pickets, and tell them we were rebel scouts and that General Grant's army had all crossed the river, and for them to fly as quick as possible to infantry headquarters, and report that the Yankees were coming. I then proposed to divide these fifty men into eight squads; each squad was to give the alarm to the guards of the batteries, as the batteries were only guarded by a few men, (that is, the batteries

in the upper part of the city;) if these guards did not immediately leave the guns to shoot them down. These eight batteries were the ones that prevented our army from landing in the upper part of the city. Once in possession of the batteries to spike the guns, and signal to the fleet that we were in possession of those batteries. In my opinion, this could have been easily accomplished, as the greatest part of the infantry were three miles from the city. I then proposed to go up the river bank, and secret ourselves in a thick wood until the arrival of the gunboats. I laid all these plans before General Grant, but he would not listen to one word of it. He said it was a wild scheme, and that he could not consent to have fifty of his brave men slaughtered for nothing. He would consent to my going through any dangers that I would voluntarily. Although the general and I could not agree on generalship, I firmly believe, until this day, if I could have been furnished the means I required, I could have accomplished the object I proposed. General Grant told me to watch the movements of the enemy, and collect what information I could of their movements, and report to him from time to time. I then entered on my duties, watching the movements of the enemy in front of our lines. The general told me I must draw rations with my company, as he had no other provisions for to draw rations for me. One day, after a hard day's work, I came to my company about ten o'clock at night. There was a fourth corporal, named Kidder, in our company, who was very desirous of wearing shoulder straps. The said Kidder notified me that I must stand guard, (after I had gone to bed.) I remonstrated, stating I was on other duties, detailed by General Grant, to which he said I was only detailed to perform one job, and that was now accomplished, and I must do duty with the company. I told him I would go as soon as I could get up. This did not satisfy him, he reported me to a man named Conway, an Irish lieutenant. This said Conway usually was in the habit of getting a peculiar weakness at any time the regiment was ordered into battle, (this weakness was inveterately drunk.) There was a guard detailed forthwith. I was put under guard outside of my tent until daylight. They said I would be reported to the colonel of the regiment in the morning, and have me punished sevevely, for disobeying the orders

of the fourth corporal, (who was anxious to be lieutenant.) But long before my accusers awoke in the morning, I reported myself to the colonel, stating to him that I was not yet released from detail, and that I was performing service for General Grant. He released me from the guard.

I now borrowed a pair of field glasses from Captain Clark, who was in command of company A. Captain Clark was a brave soldier. I saw him in many battles; he was always at his post, both cool and deliberate.

On this day I proceeded down the river a distance of two miles, where I found an old dugout, which I fitted up, and succeeded in getting to the river. I went down the river using as great caution as possible, keeping close to the banks so as to escape detection. When I was most to Vicksburg I landed, and secreted my boat amongst the weeds, where there was a bend in the river. I then proceeded down the bank, taking observations. I saw them planting a new water battery. While I was taking close observations through my glass, there suddenly jumped up a man on the levee, but a short distance from me, dressed in citizen's clothes. To avoid him seeing me I crept from the levee and hid under a log; I had not lain here many minutes before I found I was surrounded by about forty rebels. I had in my possession at this time General Grant's pass, and my field glasses, and other unmistakable proofs that I was in the Union army. It may well be imagined that my position was anything but comfortable. Every moment they remained was to me like hours. They stood about twenty minutes discussing the position of our fleet, army, etc., then they separated and went in different directions. When I found they had all disappeared I returned to my boat. It was then quite dark. I paddled up the river, having to be cautious lest I should run against some floating timber which was continually floating down the river. When I was about half way back to our lines, I found the current so strong I could not gain an inch. The boat was now half full of water, and I had no means of bailing it out; therefore it was unmanageable. I headed for the bank, and as I was near shore I ran against a tree, which was floating in the water. It upset my boat, throwing me and the contents into the river; which consisted of a field glass worth

forty dollars, one axe, canteen, haversack and rubber blanket. All I saved from this disaster was my paddle, which proved to be the best thing I could have saved, as it was easier to paddle myself to the shore than it was the boat. I had about two miles to walk to reach our lines. These two miles were covered with water, like one vast lake. The only way I could tell whither I was going in the river was by the paddle; if I could feel bottom I felt safe, if not, I would turn my course. The most of this distance the water was hip deep, part of the time to my arms, and the balance of the time to my chin. When I neared the levee, it became so deep that I was unable to wade through it, as it was deeper where they dug out to build the levee. But I remembered where there was some flood wood; I went round to and managed to get across on it. When crossing this flood wood I recollected the pickets were but a few rods distant, but it was so dark I could not see them. I thought if they heard my noise they would take me for a rebel. I hallooed to them, and told them I was a friend with a pass. All of them left the levee immediately, without saying a word to me, leaving a clear road for me to my company. On arriving at the company, and relating my adventure, the boys laughed at me, and said I got enough of scouting this time.

This is only part of a book, which will soon be published by the writer of this. The book will give a minute account of two months and a half spent by the writer inside the rebel lines, over an area of country from Vicksburg to Port Hudson; from there to Mobile, Alabama; from thence to Chattanooga, Tennessee; then to Columbus, Alabama; from there to Grenada, Mississippi, and was there taken prisoner, tried as a spy, and condemned to death, but escaped from the prison at Jackson, Mississippi, only one day previous to the day of execution. Made his way through two hundred and fifty miles on rebel territory, and finally reached the Union lines in safety. It will also give interesting

sketches of what the writer saw on Sherman's march to the sea. It contains the real feelings of the rebels in the last hours of the rebellion, as the writer conversed with many of the leading rebels. It will also give a detail account of the way that soldiers were cheated out of their rations, those rations converted into greenbacks, which were put in commissaries' pockets. Also how hospital stewards and army physicians disposed of sanitary supplies. Also the method by which provost marshals determined whether a man was fit for military duty or not. It also contains the method by which bounty-jumping was successfully carried on between provost marshals and bounty brokers. It will also give an account how paymasters could pay the army and make twenty-five per cent. more than their salaries. It will also show how shoulder-straps could be away from their commands, and at home in the North, reported on the sick-list, without examinations. It will further show how shoulder-straps could obtain liquors by the aid of suttlers, when it was prohibited by the commanding generals.

This work will contain six hundred pages. It will be printed with large type, on the very best paper. It will contain a lithograph of Vicksburg and Young's Point, and the positions of the fleet, army, etc. It will also contain a lithograph of the city of Grenada, and the headquarters of the rebel General Tillman, where the writer was brought before for examination. It will contain a perfect steel engraving of General U. S. Grant, and also a steel engraving of the writer. One half of the book will be bound with red and blue morocco, guilt edges, and trimmed other ways with gold; the other half will be neatly bound in cloth, guilt edges, and trimmed other ways with gold. Books bound in morocco, will cost three dollars and fifty cents; those bound in cloth, will cost two dollars and fifty cents. Any one wishing to subscribe for the work, will send a letter to S. Woolworth, No. 816, South Clark street, Chicago, Illinois, with his address, and name of post office, he will be forwarded one of these pamphlets immediately on the receipt of his letter; his name will be placed on the list of subscribers, and the book will be forwarded to him as soon as published; it will be sent by express with collection.

I take the liberty of offering this work to the public, in behalf of the soldiers who fought for the preservation of this Union. I

was one of those soldiers myself; to show the wrongs heaped on the soldiers; and to show the sufferings endured by the soldiers, to preserve the nation. The writer has never seen anything written by any one but shoulder-straps, or leading politicians, emblazoned with heroic deeds and bravery of shoulder-straps. The public will please excuse all imperfections in the work, as it is not written by any great orator, divine, or politician. It is only written by a private soldier, without fear or reward.

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